

This small bird of marshes and grasslands in central-southern South America (Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Argentina) appears to be extremely local owing to habitat loss and trade, but may be under-recorded.

DISTRIBUTION The Marsh Seedeater (see Remarks 1) occurs to about 1,100 m in south-central South America, being recorded very locally from south-central Brazil, north-central Paraguay, north-eastern Argentina and Uruguay; it is probably an austral migrant, and apparently only a summer resident (November to April) in the southern portion of its breeding range (Ridgely and Tudor 1989).

Brazil The northernmost records must refer to wintering migrants (Sick 1985).

Minas Gerais The only record is from an island on the rio São Francisco near Pirapora, where a male was collected on 21 September 1973 (specimen in MNRJ; also Sick 1985).

Goiás Records are only from Emas National Park, October 1979-1981 (Ridgely and Tudor 1989), and again in 1984 (R. A. Rowlett *per* B. C. Forrester *in litt.* 1992).

Mato Grosso The species has been recorded recently from Poconé (C. Yamashita verbally 1987).

Mato Grosso do Sul There are records from Campo Grande (Sick 1985), Corumbá and Porto Murtinho, the last consisting of one male in a group of other seedeaters in November 1987 (C. Yamashita verbally 1987).

Rio Grande do Sul Belton (1984-1985) recorded it from “scattered marshy localities in south and west between November 3 and February 19”; although four of these localities are indicated on a map, only two are specified: Fazenda Casa Branca, 29°36’S 56°15’W, Alegrete, where a pair was collected on 20 (*sic*) February 1975; and near Canal de São Gonçalo across from Santa Isabel (Santa Isabel do Sul), where one bird was seen on 7 January 1976 (Belton 1984-1985, whence coordinates). An older record is from Itaquí, where four males and one female were obtained in November 1914 (specimens in MZUSP; also Pinto 1944).

Paraguay Older records are from Villa Concepción (Kerr 1901; see Remarks 2), Estancia Hermosa and río Siete Pontas (Meyer de Schauensee 1966). The species was seen in pantanal habitat at Surubi-y (untraced), Central department, March 1990 (J. Escobar *in litt.* 1991); it was found in grasslands south-west of San Juan Bautista in Misiones, March 1991 (P. A. Scharf *per* R. S. Ridgely *in litt.* 1991), with a sighting in the former (at Estancia Ñu Pora) of two in March 1989 (F. E. Hayes *in litt.* 1991); and a bird has been seen in Mbaracayú National Park, Canindeyú department (P. A. Scharf *per* F. E. Hayes *in litt.* 1991).

Argentina Records are from: (*Misiones*) on the Argentine side of Iguazú Falls, recently (D. Finch *per* B. C. Forrester *in litt.* 1992), and otherwise by the reports of local bird-trappers near Posadas, although searches there have been fruitless (A. Garelo *per* J. C. Chebez *in litt.* 1992); (*Chaco*) Chaco National Park, 1985 (Saibene 1985; also J. C. Chebez *in litt.* 1986, Ridgely and Tudor 1989); (*Corrientes*) Mburucuyá, 28°03’S 58°14’W, January 1991 (J. Hutton *per* J. C. Chebez *in litt.* 1992; coordinates from Paynter 1985); in the Esteros del Iberá zone north of Mercedes, February 1983 (J. C. Chebez *in litt.* 1986) and January 1991 (D. Willis *in litt.* 1991); Colonia Carlos Pellegrini, 28°32’S 57°10’W, where breeding proved, November 1976 (S. Narosky *per* J. C. Chebez *in litt.* 1992; coordinates from Paynter 1985); (*Entre Ríos*) an undated locality, November 1983 (D. F. Stotz *in litt.* 1988); the type-locality, Concepción del Uruguay, 1880/1881 (Barrows 1883, Hellmayr 1938; specimens in BMNH, MCZ); río Mandisoví, 30°56’S 57°55’W, March 1939 (specimen in MNHN; coordinates from Paynter 1985); from the vicinity of arroyo Barú, untraced, 1968; and Paranacito, untraced, 1968 (M. Nores and D. Yzurieta *in litt.* 1986); Federal department near arroyo Feliciano, January 1987 (Chebez *et al.* *in prep.*); arroyo Capilla (c.33°00’S 58°28’W), repeatedly in summer (breeding) since 1988; Balneario Ñandubaysal (c.33°02’S 58°16’W), January 1990; Colonia Ubajay (c.33°02’S 58°16’W), December 1990; Puerto Boca (33°03’S 58°23’W), December/January 1991/1992, where breeding proved (all records at these four sites and coordinates from E. I. Abadie, B. M. López Lanús and M. Pearman *in litt.* 1992); (*Buenos Aires*) Otamendi Strict Nature Reserve (A. G. di Giacomo *per* J. C. Chebez *in litt.* 1992). An untraced locality is Isla Ella (two specimens in BMNH), somewhere in the Paraná delta (J. C. Chebez *in litt.* 1992), also a site for Dot-winged Crake *Porzana spiloptera*, as is the Otamendi reserve (see relevant account).

Uruguay Records are from Colonia Palma, on the río Uruguay, Artigas department, where one male was collected in November 1955; north-west of Laguna Negra, Rocha department, where six or seven birds were seen daily between 24 and 27 February 1961 (both from Vaz-Ferreira and Gerzenstein 1961); and Bañados de India Muerta, also in Rocha, where two birds were seen on each of three occasions in October 1985, November 1986 and December 1987 (Arballo 1990). A. R. M. Gepp (*in litt.* 1986) referred to its local occurrence in November–February close to the río Uruguay in Salto and Artigas departments.

POPULATION The population status of the Marsh Seedeater is not clear. The species is certainly very local and, although Narosky and Yzurieta (1987) included it in the category “rare or very difficult to see” (in Argentina), it was considered locally “fairly common” by Ridgely and Tudor (1989), who noted, however, that it is apparently declining as a result of cagebird trafficking. It is indeed considered “very scarce in Argentina” (M. Nores and D. Yzurieta *in litt.* 1986) and, from the results of a recent survey, it seems clear that the species has declined substantially on its breeding grounds in north-eastern Argentina, thus deserving endangered status (Narosky and Salvador 1985, Ridgely and Tudor 1989), a conclusion endorsed by M. Nores and D. Yzurieta (*in litt.* 1986) and, for Uruguay, by A. R. M. Gepp *in litt.* (1986). In Brazil, it is apparently not rare locally in the pantanal (C. Yamashita verbally 1987), and it may be that this and other *Sporophila* species are not so much rare as poorly known (D. F. Stotz *in litt.* 1988).

ECOLOGY The Marsh Seedeater has been recorded in marshes and grasslands (Vaz-Ferreira and Gerzenstein 1961, Sick 1985, Ridgely and Tudor 1989), the type-locality being described as “an indescribable mixture of land, water, and grass – the latter predominating” (Barrows 1883). In Uruguay, it was found in the same habitat as the near-threatened Dark-throated Seedeater *S. ruficollis* (Vaz-Ferreira and Gerzenstein 1961); at Emas National Park, Goiás, the species has been found to be a regular member of mixed non-breeding *Sporophila* flocks (Ridgely and Tudor 1989); in September it was recorded on an island on the upper río São Francisco with 10 other species of this genus, forming a concentration of “hundreds” of migrating birds in seeding *Echinochloa crus-gavonis* grasslands (Sick 1985); at the Esteros del Iberá it was recorded together with the near-threatened Chestnut Seedeater *S. cinnamomea* and two other species of the genus (D. Willis *in litt.* 1991). In Entre Ríos it inhabits both marshes along rivers and isolated humid marshes, dominated by *Panicum grumosum* which, together with other marsh vegetation such as *Cortaderia selloana*, *Scirpus californicus* and *Eryngium* spp. and bushes such as *Acacia caven*, *Salix humboldtiana* and *Cephalantus glabratus*, are used for perching and song-posts, with seeds of *Paspalum dilatatum*, *C. selloana* and others being taken as food (M. Pearman *in litt.* 1992). Its seasonal movements have been considered a post-breeding wandering, particularly as wet areas dry up in autumn and winter (Short 1975). Breeding has been recorded in north-eastern Argentina (Narosky and Salvador 1985, Ridgely and Tudor 1989). Birds collected in high, dense grass in a marsh, November, were considered to be breeding there (Barrows 1883). A nest with two eggs, apparently a full clutch, was found in late December 1991 and dependent fledged young have been observed in February (E. I. Abadie and M. Pearman *in litt.* 1992). A male collected on 20 February 1975 in Rio Grande do Sul had enlarged testes, but a female on the same date had inactive ovaries (Belton 1984–1985). At arroyo Capilla, where the species was present at a high density, one territory was estimated to be 50x30 m (M. Pearman *in litt.* 1992).

THREATS Male seedeaters of various species are popular cagebirds in Brazil and Argentina, where heavy trapping pressure has led to serious declines in several species, especially the group known locally in Argentina as “capuchinos” (Narosky and Salvador 1985, Ridgely and Tudor 1989). Failure to find the species at Posadas, Misiones, Argentina, was suspected to reflect exhaustion of the population there by bird-trappers (J. C. Chebez *in litt.* 1992). Vaz-Ferreira and Gerzenstein (1961) recorded that, in the area where a specimen was obtained (Colonia Palma, Artigas) in Uruguay, every year birds are captured to be kept in captivity. The Esteros del Iberá, judged by one well travelled observer to be the finest grassland seen anywhere in South America, are much grazed by cattle and suffer much annual burning (D. Willis verbally 1991).

MEASURES TAKEN The species is protected under Brazilian law (Bernardes *et al.* 1990) and has been

recorded from Emas National Park. In Paraguay there is a record from Mbaracayú National Park, and in Argentina reports from the planned Mburucuyá National Park and the existing Chaco National Park, Iberá Provincial Park and Otamendi Strict Nature Reserve. The Iberá grasslands in Argentina (about 20,000 km² including at least one city) is grazed by cattle and outside the provincial park boundary at least burning is a standard practice (D. Willis *in litt.* 1991). At one south-east Entre Ríos breeding locality the population and its habitat is protected by the landowner (M. Pearman verbally 1992).

MEASURES PROPOSED Narosky and Salvador (1985) urged the prohibition of the trapping, trading and keeping of the “capuchino” seedeaters, namely Marsh, Tawny-bellied *S. hypoxantha*, Dark-throated, Chestnut, Rufous-rumped *S. hypochroma* and Entre Ríos *S. zelichi* (see relevant account). Surveys should be conducted in order to determine better the species's range and status, and in Argentina it would seem important to target those areas in Entre Ríos, namely Puerto Boca and arroyo Capilla, where the species has been found at reasonably high densities and where the other threatened or near-threatened seedeaters, Entre Ríos, Rufous-rumped and Chestnut, have also been recorded (M. Pearman *in litt.* 1992); in Corrientes three of these (not Entre Ríos Seedeater) occur together around Laguna Iberá (D. Willis *in litt.* 1991) and should clearly be studied and conserved as a group. The conservation of Puerto Boca would be particularly satisfying, as it also holds the threatened Sickle-winged Nightjar *Eleothreptus anomalus* and Saffron-cowled Blackbird *Xanthopsar flavus* as well as the near-threatened Black-and-white Monjita *Heteroxolmis dominicana* (M. Pearman *in litt.* 1992).

REMARKS (1) Short (1975) provisionally included this bird and *S. ruficollis* within *S. hypoxantha*, which would be a polymorphic species, with rufous-, black- and white-throated phases in males, the *palustris* form occurring rarely and totally within the range of the others; while Sick (1985) and other authorities did not follow this treatment, Ridgely and Tudor (1989) partially agreed, considering *S. palustris* and *S. ruficollis* closely related and possibly only colour phases of a single species (though never having found them at the same locality), but pointing out that neither seems to be especially close to *S. hypoxantha*, a considerably more numerous and widespread species. (2) The identification of the specimen (lost) from Villa Concepción has been considered doubtful (Hellmayr 1938).